

We are here to follow Jesus as the Christ, yet we often forget that it calls us to do some strange things, to do some things that the world would call “foolish.” Paul uses the term “fools for Christ” in his letter to the Corinthian church, and states that the symbol of the Cross may be “foolish” to many, but to us it is the power of God, that when we are weak, we may actually grow stronger, because we rely on a power greater than ourselves. The gospel of Jesus Christ turns common notions of wise and foolish upside down. Paul challenges his churches: how many of you were wise or of noble birth? He insists that God uses what is weak in the world to further God’s purposes.

There are many examples of biblical heroes who were the most “unlikely” people to be used by God: Moses, the stutterer, David the young keeper of sheep and later adulterer, Jacob who deceived his father to steal a birthright. Joseph the younger brother with the strange dreams... Peter the impulsive, uneducated fisherman, Paul the persecutor of early Christians.

Let’s consider Jesus and his “foolish” sayings or actions. Who would turn the other cheek? (maybe once, but not repeatedly!). What about those beatitudes? How are the poor, the meek and the humble and the peacemakers really blessed? Why should we come like a child if we are to find God? Speaking of finding God, Jesus emphasizes that we need to lose our life if we are to find it. So Jesus is advocating losing or letting go of so many things in our lives. Is there really magic or healing in letting go? Jesus says so. Why does Jesus say that the last shall be the first? Or that the humble shall be exalted? Jesus advocates and does a lot of strange or foolish things! Why would Jesus be sleeping or taking a nap in the back of the boat in the middle of a storm? Why would Jesus say in the presence of his family, who is my mother or my brother or my sister? Those who do the will of God! What is the matter with this guy? How foolish to tell your biological family that you have a more important family, your spiritual family!

And how “foolish” Jesus seemed about money! Apparently he was not big on 401(k) nor savings accounts. He tells the story of one man who kept adding to his savings, building more and more barns for his extra grain, but warned that he might lose his very life the next day. He says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven! He tells a rich man to sell all he has, give it away to the poor, then come follow him. Or what about the foolishness in his story about the all-day laborers, who got the same pay as the laborers who went to work at the 11th hour? But apparently God's Grace has to do with a generosity that realizes the ones hired at the last hour did not have the same chances or opportunities!

God's Grace may seem foolish in that God's Mercy is greater than God's judgment. John 3:16 says God “so loved” the world, and that Jesus was sent, and did NOT come to condemn.... So why are we always wanting to blame and punish and condemn so many others? In Jesus' story, The prodigal or wayward son is not punished, but is welcomed home with a party... for what was lost is now found, he who was dead is now alive! The older brother wanted to see punishment.

Everything that Jesus says or does can seem like turning the world upside down! Losing and letting go can help us find. Weaknesses can be turned into strengths. The last may indeed be first, and a little child can show us the way to real living.

Some early monks or “desert fathers” were often called “fools for Christ.” They would forsake worldly wealth and material things to rely on God to provide, looking like half naked beggars, living in caves. That is way too extreme or foolish for most of us, but there still is a beauty in some of the monastic orders that can do with so much less, that can live so simply... I'm thinking of Buddhist monks, some with the practice of just having one bowl for their meals. Maybe Chipotle and other places are on to something when they offer the taco bowl, or the fruit bowl, or the

one I like: the Acai Bowl. Combine a few nutritious ingredients into one bowl and call it a meal! These modern bowls can help us think of Jesus' "foolish" instructions to his followers to take no money, no food, and only one shirt on their journey, in other words: to live simply, and find the support of community.

I recall that both Saint Francis and the Buddha were born into nobility and wealth, and voluntarily gave up privilege (how foolish!) to spend more time out with the common folk, with the majority in their communities, to spend more time in the pursuit of peace and love and joy, in forming small monastic communities dedicated to living together with more peace and more sharing

Many of us remember the Dutch spiritual teacher Henri Nouwen.... How "foolish" of him to give up being a prestigious professor at Yale and Harvard, to give the last decade of his life to be a chaplain at a severely disabled community called Daybreak. They were mentally and physically disabled; some could not even get out of bed without assistance. All needed the assistance of group living. But in his "foolishness" Henri would often testify that he found true community and presence of Christ in that setting. We remember the words of Jesus: Even when you did it unto the LEAST of these my brothers and sisters, you did it unto me! Listen to Henri speak about his handicapped community: *Jesus speaks through the broken hearts of the handicapped who are considered marginal and useless, but God has chosen them to be the poor through whom he makes his presence known. Sometimes the most "unlikely people" are chosen by God to make us see.*

Then there is the "foolishness" of those who literally give their lives to make the world better: how foolish of Peter and early disciples to keep preaching about Jesus when leading Jews and Romans forbade them to do so (yes, they were killed). How "foolish" of Martin Luther King Jr. to keep on the path of civil rights even after death threats, and surveillance by our country's leaders, how foolish of Dietrich Bonhoeffer to keep on his path for change in the face of threats by

Germany's leaders (yes, he was imprisoned and killed). Nowadays, we could think of numerous examples of those who speak truth, especially "speaking truth to power" (and naturally receiving threats and punishments).

We have to remember that as followers of Jesus, his life and teachings were so often counter-cultural, counter-intuitive; he really could turn things upside down, teaching with ways that were not the "wisdom of this world." Jesus was "in the world but not of the world," and we are called to follow his way. We are called to a life of prayer... (how useless or foolish it may seem to spend time in prayer... Listen to Henri Nouwen again regarding prayer: *"If I believe that the first commandment is to love God with my whole heart mind and soul and then I should at least be able to spend one hour a day with nobody else but God. The question as to whether it is helpful, useful, practical, or fruitful is completely irrelevant, since the only reason to love is love itself."* It may sound foolish to the world at large, but we pray, meditating on the amazing grace and love of God who sent Jesus not to condemn, but to save and give life... life abundantly. To grow in love, and the ability to give and receive love, is to spend time with the Source of Love.

Make no mistake about it - If we are trying to lift up the lowly, it may seem foolish, but it is Jesus' work! If there is "unequal" generosity to those who have little opportunity, it may seem foolish, but it is Jesus' grace! If we speak up for anyone who is ostracized or belittled, it is Jesus' justice work! If we jump off the treadmill of work for awhile, taking sabbath rest, it may seem foolish, but it IS Jesus' way, the way of Grace. In a world of ambition, competitiveness for power, the way of Jesus seems foolish. It is the way of vulnerability, humility, grace, loving every neighbor. It may seem foolish, but it IS the way of new life! Amen.